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THE PLAN OF REFORM, PROPOSED BY SIR FRANCIS BURRETT

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# THE *PLAN OF REFORM,*

PROPOSED BY

SIR FRANCIS BURDETT,

CORRECTLY REPORTED IN

## TWO SPEECHES

DELIVERED IN PARLIAMENT, RECOMMENDING AN INQUIRY  
INTO THE STATE OF THE REPRESENTATION.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED

MR. PERCEVAL'S OBJECTIONS TO THE MOTION,

AND

A LIST OF  
THE MINORITY WHO VOTED FOR IT

*In the House of Commons,*

*June 15th, 1809:*

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PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE COMMITTEE WHO CONDUCTED THE  
LATE WESTMINSTER ELECTION.

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# ADVERTISEMENT.

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THE following CORRECT REPORT of the Speeches delivered by Sir FRANCIS BURDETT in the House of Commons, in support of his Motion for an Inquiry into the State of the Representation, is submitted to the Public, as a refutation of the gross and unfounded calumnies, with which the advocates of corruption have endeavoured to asperse the character of the patriotic Representative of Westminster. The perusal of these pages will convince the British Nation, that the worthy Baronet's PLAN OF REFORM calls for no change, contemplates no revolution, but is, on the contrary, a temperate effort to restore to the Constitution its original spirit, and to secure to the People "*the reality and uses of Representation in Parliament.*"

The Speech of the CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER, in opposition to this plan, is also given according to the best report of it that could be obtained, in order that, wherever the subject of REFORM may be considered, the people may be acquainted, that, as the matter now stands, they are regarded as *accomplices* in all the corruptions, and crimes, connected with the present system; and that even the Ministers would blush for what they do, could they not console themselves under the delusive notion that the *Country* is friendly to corruption.

It is of the utmost importance, that by this declaration the Minister has acknowledged, that the voice of

the People must decide the question. They must now speak their sentiments, in language that cannot be misunderstood. They must firmly and unceasingly demand a radical and effectual Reform, if they have the smallest regard to their own reputation ; for if, at the next Session of Parliament, the Minister can possibly retain his opinion that *they would rather unite to oppose Reform than any thing else*, all mankind may attribute the corruptions of the English Government to the depravity of the English People.

The Minister's apology for the course he pursues, is, in effect, an " appeal to the People." Let every one who desires Reform answer that appeal as he ought; and every principle of justice must unite to grant the wishes of the Nation.

*Westminster, June 29, 1809.*

# PLAN OF *REFORM.*

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A BILL having been introduced into Parliament by Mr. CURWEN with a design to restrain the profligacy of the Borough-monger system, and that attempt, feeble as it was, having been wholly defeated by ministerial amendments, on the 12th inst., previous to the Bill being passed,

SIR FRANCIS BURDETT rose and declared that, in every consideration he was able to give the Bill, from the moment of its original introduction, and through the various discussions which attended its further progress, he could arrive at no other conclusion than that it was a measure of indemnity for past corruptions, and of security for future similar offences. It had been contended by the last speaker (Mr. D. Giddy) that no improvement or reform was necessary, inasmuch as all the defects of which complaint was made arose from the legitimate influence of property; and that of course political power was and ought to be connected with such influence. Without explaining the grounds upon which such a political proposition ought to be taken, the argument of the hon. Gentleman answered itself. For if those places and that influence, which are the effects of property, and from property alone take their title to influence, are to be thus defended, what was the defence for the continuance of influence unconnected with property, where emolument was the produce and no duty the exercise? Was, he asked, such a species of influence to draw the same support for political power as property? If it were not, and so he contended, then he would ask, In what consisted the utility of this measure, and in what way could its proposed advantages operate? As



an enemy to corruption, he asked, did it diminish either its sources or its influence? Did it, though professing Reform, effect any one measure of advantage, the accomplishment of which could alone prove the use of Parliamentary Reform? The Honourable Mover, who originally introduced the Bill, could, in its present state, scarcely acknowledge it as his measure. His, indeed, must be a mobility of political feeling, if, so metamorphosed, he could recognise it as his own, melted down as it had been so completely in the crucible of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. By whom was it supported? What influence, under those changes which some would affect to call improvements, now recommend it to the sanction of the House? Strange to tell, this measure of reform, this remedy for existing evils, this, which in its operation was to have the powerful effect of preventing their recurrence, was now recommended, fostered, and improved by the very persons who either had committed, were accused of committing, or by their votes in that House had sanctioned the very criminal transactions and offences against the principles of the constitution and the independence of Parliament, which this very Bill, so supported, now went to remedy and redress. Could the House forget what was the nature of the plea, when such transactions were offered to be proved at its bar?—when the very author of this Bill (for, so changed, so perverted from its original import, he could not call it any longer the measure of the honourable Gentleman behind him (Mr. Curwen) had himself been accused of conniving at such an offence;—when his noble colleague (Castlereagh) near him had from his own lips been self-convicted—when, indeed, from every side of the House justification, and not correction, was the tenor of individual sentiment and of general discussion. And in what did that justification consist? It was only to be found in the extensiveness of this great constitutional offence. Now, it did happen in our courts of criminal jurisprudence, where the ignorant, and the poor, and the wretched had to answer for their misdeeds, that those very crown lawyers who here defended that crime upon its extensiveness and its frequency, converted that very frequency and extensiveness in the former case, into an aggravation of the crime, and into an



additional argument for the propriety of conviction and the necessity of a severe punishment ! Had the House, when such offences were directly charged against individuals, heard any such constitutional doctrine from those whose situations bound them to deliver it ? No, no. Neither direct accusation, acknowledged frequency, nor admitted extensiveness had produced any effect, until the evil itself, and the source from whence it emanated, became too evident to be longer concealed from the people, or protected by those interested. And what, after all, was the remedy ?—A measure in its origin far from being effectual, but, under its present modifications, only, what he must repeat, an indemnity for past offences and a security for future corruptions.—There has, however, resulted this beneficial consequence—that the country feels, that this House acknowledges the absolute necessity of something being done. You yourselves have now admitted the propriety of the question. You have discussed a species of what you call reform. Whatever reform such a measure may create in the regulations of your House, I strenuously deny that it tends to any reform in the Representation of the People.

I am, Mr. Speaker, and ever have been, ready to avow my opinions upon all public subjects, and I do presume my conviction of the absolute necessity of a reform in the constitution is very well ascertained. Were I then to subscribe to the present measure, as constituting any essential part of the reform which I feel to be necessary, I should then be guilty of not only having aggravated the evil, but of having added injury to insult, in the disappointment such a course of conduct would give to the fair hopes of the country. I speak thus, because I am convinced that such an affectation of reform would not satisfy that enlightened portion of the British people to whose judgement and whose discrimination, whatever the Gentlemen who meet here may say to the contrary, I am and ever shall be most desirous to give credit and attention. All that has been or is demanded are the rights of the Constitution. Upon that Constitution individuals will speak according to the particular bias of their opinions and their objects. (*Hear ! hear ! from the Ministerial Benches.*) Those Gentlemen who so loudly cheer, perhaps, suppose me to have been caught in some trap.

They will, however, please to recollect that I have professed to be no speculator upon the Constitution, that I have regulated my opinion by the Statutes of Parliament, and that for every abuse of which I have complained, and for every remedy which I have felt it my duty to propose, I have given from those Statutes both chapter and verse. Notwithstanding such has been my conduct, I have been opposed with objections inconsistent with themselves. By a noble Lord (Porchester) it has been objected that, in deducing my views from the Statutes of the land, I have restricted myself to a narrow, low, and uninformative line of information—by others I have been charged with being the supporter of abstract charges inapplicable to the practical and beneficial exercise of our public duties. The time is now arrived when I feel it necessary no longer to leave room for those insinuations which have been so frequently and so generally expressed under the definition of public demagogues and popular agitators, and of which I know that I was the butt. On my part there shall be no ambiguity. I wish the people, upon this vital question of Reform, to know the nature and extent of my opinion; and I am determined that this House shall not separate—that its members shall not return amongst their constituents—in fact, that this House shall not continue longer in the contaminated state in which it has exhibited itself, without giving some pledge to the country of its future intention upon the vital question of Reform, and thereby giving peace and confidence to the public mind. With that object it is my intention to come down to this House and propose a short Resolution, calculated to inform both this House and the People of the length I am inclined to go. I have only to add, that my views on the subject are neither hastily considered, nor suddenly put into a practical system. Whatever opinion may be ultimately pronounced upon them, I feel the consolation of having weighed them with attention. I have therefore only to take the present opportunity of giving notice, that tomorrow I will submit to this House a Resolution, binding it early in the next session to take into its consideration the propriety of a Parliamentary Reform.

· WHEN the day arrived on which Sir Francis had promised to propose his Resolution, there was not a sufficient number of Members present to make a House. It is usual in such cases to renew the notice; which custom had the honourable Baronet complied with, it is probable he might have been ultimately baffled. On the 15th inst. therefore he stood up in his place and developed his plan to Parliament in the following words:—

SIR, I rise to offer to the attention of the House a Plan of Reform, not for its immediate adoption, but for its future consideration; to state my opinion to the House and the public upon this subject, and to propose to the House to come to a Resolution (according to frequent custom at the close of a session), the object of which is, to hold out an assurance to the country, that the House will, at an early period in the next session, take into its consideration the necessity of a Reform in the State of the Representation.

This course I am urged, amongst other reasons, to adopt, in order to get rid of the misrepresentation (unintentional I am willing to believe) which has been so long and so actively propagated, with regard to my views and opinions on this momentous point; the mischievous tendency of which misrepresentations, as affecting myself personally, would alone have very little influence upon my mind; but it has much, combined with the public interest. As involved in this most essential question, I therefore feel it a duty to myself and the public to relieve this subject from all misrepresentation, ambiguity, and misconception: and in now proposing for discussion, but not for immediate adoption, the outline of a specific Plan, I am answering those repeated calls which have been made upon me in this House, to state to this House, and to the public, definitely and precisely, what my views are upon the subject (perpetually agitated) of Parliamentary Reform, that henceforward it may be fully and clearly understood, how far I do really mean to go, and at what point I mean to stop.

This is a subject which has long engaged my most anxious attention; and though I very early stated my opinion respecting it, that opinion was not thoughtlessly formed, or rashly hazarded; but after the most diligent inquiry, and minute investigation. If I did not then offer it to the public attention without due reflection, still less did it originate in those views and mischievous motives, to which it has been falsely ascribed,

—a desire to excite discontent, and to agitate the public mind by exaggerated statements of undefined grievances, beyond the reach of practical constitutional redress. I am ready to admit, if such were the case, that my conduct would be as culpable as those who most misrepresent it would wish it to be considered; and I am willing to confess, that to excite discontent in the public mind by fixing its eye upon necessary and unavoidable evils, beyond the power of remedy, would be as exceptionable and dishonest a proceeding, as to mislead them from their true remedy, and obstinately to withhold that easy redress which the Constitution so clearly points out, and so amply affords.

In this case, I shall cautiously abstain from any exaggeration of public grievance, or any expression calculated to excite in any gentleman, or set of gentlemen, the slightest irritation, or asperity of feeling; it being my wish that the question should stand on its own merits, that it should be coolly and candidly considered, and that it should be the subject, not of angry contention, but of fair discussion. At the same time, there are some doctrines and opinions which have been recently promulgated in this house, of so misleading and mischievous a tendency, that I cannot allow myself to pass them over altogether without some animadversion.

The course I have prescribed for myself is to state the evils arising out of the defective state of the representation, and then to point out the remedy, which is simple, and perfectly practicable, not only consistent with the habits and interests of the people, and in unison with the laws and constitution of the country, but is (as I think I can show) *the Constitution itself*:—Let others deal in whimsical speculations, in undefined mysterious notions of a Constitution, which eludes the grasp, and soars above the conception of ordinary minds, let them amuse themselves with intricate theories and fine-spun metaphysics, whilst I shall hold fast by that plain and substantial Constitution, adapted to the contemplation of common understandings, *to be found in the Statute Book, and recognised by the Common Law of the Land*.—If it can be shown that the principles on which I proceed are erroneous, unconstitutional, and inconsistent with the ancient, fundamental laws of England, I shall stand corrected, and willingly aban-

don my proposition ; but if, on the contrary, I shall be able to demonstrate, that the present system is the creature of innovation, and a departure from the old, established, *unrepealed* laws of the country, and that a recurrence to the practice of these laws is an easy and adequate remedy for the evil ; though I may not indulge a hope of the concurrence of this House, yet I may hope for the approbation of 'the Public ; and, at all events, I shall enjoy the satisfaction of knowing that I have performed an essential duty, both to the people and myself, in bringing forward the present inquiry.

Before I proceed to the consideration of the subject more immediately before the House, I think proper to make some remarks upon those very extraordinary doctrines to which I have before alluded.—It has been asserted that corruption is not only a part of our Constitution—that it was not only necessary and to be tolerated, but (as it should seem) that the Constitution was to be tolerated for the sake of the corruption. We have heard it seriously alleged, that without the auxiliary of corruption in this House the Constitution would be insecure, that the government could not be carried on. It has been described as “growing with our growth, and strengthening with our strength:” it had been more consolatory to have been informed that it decayed with our decay, and diminished with our decrease. One can hardly conceive a more unhappy quotation for the purposes of those who have made the allusion. What is it the poet speaks of when he says it

“Grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength?”

It is a state of disease necessarily terminating in final dissolution :

“The young *disease*, which must subdue at length,  
Grows with our growth, and strengthens with our strength.”

It applies strongly, indeed, in favour of those who call for some remedy to arrest the progress of destruction, for some stimulus to re-invigorate the Constitution, and save it from decay by extirpating the vile and loathsome canker of corruption, which, preying upon the vitals, palsies the energies and consumes the substance of the country.—The various and contradictory arguments by which this corruption has been attempted to be defended challenge particular observation : at one time it has been alleged to be so trifling as to be un-



worthy of our notice: it is represented *then* as “mere cheese-parings and candle ends.” It may, however, be worth remarking (by the bye) an English proverb to be found in Ray’s Collection, which says “all the King’s cheese goes in parings;” and if a cheese is cut straight through the middle it is all parings; whilst at other times these cheese-parings assume a shape so formidable as to render any attempt to diminish them fruitless and unavailing: so that, inconsistent in argument, consistent in principle, the defenders of corruption, as it suits their purpose, either represent it as a pygmy beneath notice, or a giant not to be contended with: from which alternate modes of defence we are forced to infer that, in the minds of some gentlemen, corruption, be it small or be it great, is not only not to be checked or controlled, but to be fostered and encouraged: we are to hug our disease, and dote on dissolution. But so very opposite is my idea upon this subject, that I say, Be corruption small or great, let it assume what form or shape it may, it is an intolerable evil: in the first stage of it I would have said “*Principiis obsta:*” at our high tide of it I will exclaim “*Ne plus ultra,*” that delay is death. The question now is, how the career of this destroyer is to be arrested? In my opinion, there is no way of doing this with effect but by a *Reform of this House*.

Another doctrine equally mischievous as the former, which it was triumphantly said no human creature could contradict, was that of all men acting from *mixed motives*. This may be a convenient doctrine for public men, but I trust will appear as unfounded and indefensible as the arguments just alluded to in support of corruption, either on account of its supposed insignificance or real magnitude: its object and bearing is, in fact, to cut up all morality by the very roots; there could be no national ground for confidence or esteem were such a doctrine once admitted. If all men are supposed to act from *mixed motives*, how can any man’s character be known? How ascertain the proportion (upon which all depends) of good and bad in the mixture? How discover from what motives any action springs, or whether it be entitled to praise or censure?

From the confidence and boldness with which this extraordinary doctrine has been advanced, it may seem ha-



zardous to risk a refutation of it; I shall nevertheless attempt to shew that the reverse is the fact, and that, so far from men acting generally from mixed motives, they never act so at all; and however metaphysical may be the notions of some gentlemen, I defy them, with all their refinement and subtilty, to produce a mixture of motives in their own minds. Motives are as impossible to mix as parallel lines to meet. Many motives, it is true, may concur to impel a man to one act, as many roads may lead to one town; many rivers direct their course to one sea, but they are not on that account mixed. Avarice, ambition, love of country, may conduce to one end; though one of these passions may predominate, the motives remain unmixed; but when put in opposition one to the other, the impossibility of mixing them becomes apparent, the strongest motive overcomes the rest. The position is quite unphilosophical, and the idea of mixed motives altogether absurd. Surely, no one will call in question the doctrine of a ruling passion, strong, even in death, to which we see and daily hear of men offering themselves up willing victims. As our senses, though they may be affected altogether, are still distinct, in like manner our minds, though they may be affected at one and the same time by more motives than one, yet do they remain unmixed. But there may be a great convenience in adopting this doctrine of mixed motives, similar to that experienced some time since in keeping *mixed accounts*; such mixture serving to create confusion and avert detection. I defy any man, however, to shew that such a doctrine is reconcileable either with morality or logic.

There is one other doctrine, which cannot be passed over without animadversion, equally dangerous in my mind with the foregoing ones. It has been held, that whilst *the forms* of the Constitution remained, there was something so excellent in the *mere forms*, that not only was the possession of them of the highest value, but a hope was thereby justified of an amelioration of the state of the country. My opinion is directly the reverse of this, in which I am supported by the authority of the greatest historians and writers upon political subjects; who have uniformly laid it down, that of all tyrannies a legislative tyranny exercised *under the forms* of a free government,

is the most tremendous and fatal, because without hope of remedy.

Tacitus, whose penetration and ability will not be disputed, depicting the melancholy condition of the Roman Empire under that relentless tyrant Tiberius, describes it as most deplorable, not only on account of flagitious acts proceeding from hypocrisy and despotism united, but still more so on account of its hopeless condition, whilst, under the mask of freedom, uncontrollable power was exercised, because that cruel tyranny was carried on *under the forms of the ancient Constitution*. There was still a Senate debating, Consuls appointed, and Tribunes of the people, *and all the forms* of the ancient republic studiously preserved; and by how much the more those forms served as a cloak to hide the odious features of despotic power, by so much the more was it terrible, irresistible, and severe: "*Quantoque majore,*" says Tacitus, "*libertatis imagine tegebantur, tanto eruptura ad infensius servitium;*" therefore I am not at all disposed to be satisfied with *the forms*, when *the spirit and essence* of the Constitution have fled. We have been reminded of the old fable of the Stag and the Horse, introduced with the view, as it should seem, of warning the people against throwing themselves into the arms of one power in order to avoid falling into those of another. The application of this fable could not be mistaken; it meant that the People should not seek to ally themselves with the Crown in order to rid themselves of the grievance of a corrupt House of Commons. To that warning I cannot lend an ear, having no dread of the prerogative of the Crown; which I know forms part of the law of the land, and is material and necessary to maintain the Constitution. *My only apprehension is from the usurpation of the legitimate prerogative, by the Borough-monger faction, and the consequent abuse of it by the agents of that faction; untruly styling themselves Ministers of the King, Servants of the Crown, through the medium of this House falsely denominating itself the Representative of the People.*—My desire, therefore, is to erect a barrier against such usurpation and abuse, by a restoration of the fair balance of the Constitution, by giving to each branch

its lawful right : thus, providing at once for the defence of the prerogative of the Crown, and the protection of the undoubted unalienable rights of the People : and I think there is no difficulty in shewing that they go well together, that one is in trust for the protection of the other, and that in consequence of their having been separated contrary to the principles and in violation of the ancient usage of our Constitution, those abuses of which the people now complain first crept in, and being once admitted, have made such rapid and tremendous strides towards our destruction ; in the midst of which, *all the specious forms* of our Constitution have been studiously observed. Thus, as in Rome, *the observance of forms*, instead of being valuable, as securing any benefit, or justifying any hope, serves only to aggravate the mischief, by adding hypocrisy to despotism, and to embitter the sufferings by deluding and mocking the people.—I must not be misunderstood—no person is more anxious than myself for the retention and maintenance of those forms ; my wish is to have *the substance also*, that the people may not be any longer duped by appearances which serve only *to perpetuate the cheat*.

A charge has been made by the abettors of corruption against those who wish for reform, as *innovators* and subverters of the Constitution of the country, whereas, the sole object of us reformers is, *to rescue the country from the effects of the innovation that has been introduced*. Those who speak so much of innovation seem to forget what the great Lord Bacon has said, that “ of all innovators, time is the greatest.” Will you then, while all things are changing around you, determine to stand still ? Will you still cling to a Rotten-borough system, the creature of innovation, nursed by usurpation, and matured by corruption ? for such shall I shew it to be. Is it reasonable that sovereignty should be attached to particular spots and places, and to convert into *Private Property* that which the Constitution has declared to be a *Public Trust*—to permit an usurped local sovereignty, independent of the King, independent of the People, and destructive to both ?—The prerogative of the Crown, had it been maintained free from encroachments, would never have suffered this anomaly, this ill-shaped monster, this Rotten-borough system, at once

formidable and contemptible, to have undermined the Constitution. During the whole course of our history, from the time of William the Conqueror to that of William the Third, down to which the legitimate prerogative of the Crown was exercised by the King, no such absurdity was conceived as a Rotten-borough Parliament.—That part of the prerogative to issue Writs to such places as were judged from time to time, according to their importance, most fit to send proper and discreet persons to the Common Council of the Nation, was a most wise and salutary provision in the code of the Constitution, and well calculated to prevent the occurrence of those evils of which so loudly and with so great reason we at this day complain—Can we suppose that any King in the possession of his just prerogative, would have thought of addressing a Writ, when he was exercising that great function of his prerogative, the assembling the Great Council of the Nation, to rotten Boroughs? or that it would have been endured if he had? The King's writs run, "*Ad Proceres et Dominos et Communes Regni*," under which description no rotten Borough could be included. Can it be imagined that St. Mawes, the posts of Gatton, or the stones of Midhurst, would have been required to send wise and discreet burgesses to assist with their advice in the Great Council of the Nation? James the First, on his accession to the throne, upon summoning the parliament, wisely exercised this prerogative by issuing a proclamation, forbidding the sending writs to decayed boroughs\*; nor was it till the prerogatives of the Crown were encroached upon at the æra of the Revolution, when the seeds of this Rotten-borough system, which have since grown so luxuriantly, and have produced such poisonous effects, the baneful influence of which we now so sensibly feel, were with woeful prodigality first scattered over the land, that the country was deprived of that corrective wisely lodged in the hands

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\* "Next, that all the sheriffs be charged that they do not direct any precept for electing and returning of any burgesses to or for any ancient borough within their counties, being so utterly ruined and decayed, that there are not sufficient resyantes to make such choice, and of whom lawful election may be made."—See Cobbett's Parliamentary History, vol. i. p. 969.



of the Crown by the Constitution, for its preservation against the unavoidable innovations of time, whilst the people, artfully led to ascribe all the evils of the two former reigns to prerogative alone, willingly acquiesced in its retrenchment;—in which they made a fatal mistake, a mistake originating in the idea that they extended their own liberties in proportion as they curtailed the prerogative of the Crown—an ingredient in the Constitution as essential to its existence, as is an uncorrupt, full, and fair Representation of the People in this House.

Had the constitutional power of the Crown remained undiminished, this House would not now be in its present contaminated state, the just and great prerogative of the Crown would have been exercised beneficially, and given the King his proper weight in the administration of national affairs, whilst the People would have a shield—and a shield and not a sword is all the people expect, in an uncorrupted and fairly elected House of Commons.—This I take to be the Constitution of England—but out of this usurpation upon the Crown, conspiring with the innovations of time, a third power has arisen, that of the *Borough-mongers*—the creature of innovation, the worm of corruption, always unknown to our laws, now become greater than the laws, equally hostile to King and People, misrepresenting one to the other, filling the mind of one with jealousy, the ears of the other with alarm, which, by perpetuating discord, reigns sole arbiter of the strife, and establishes its ignominious dominion over both. My first object, therefore, is, *to reunite the King and the People, by the constitutional bond of Allegiance on the one hand, and Protection on the other.*

“The wisdom of our laws,” says Sir Edward Coke, “is most apparent in this, that any departure from their established principles, although at the time wearing the specious appearance of advantage, never fails to bring along with it such a train of unforeseen inconveniences, as to demonstrate their excellence and the necessity of again having recurrence to them.” And, how strikingly that observation is exemplified in the consequences which have followed the departure from the principles of the Constitution, which has led to the esta-

blishment of this grievous Borough-monger system, the inconsistency of which with the principles of our laws and institutions, so glaring in the terms of the Writs of elections, and in every other point of view, no one can dispute. The simple principle upon which, as upon a pivot, the whole of this subject of Representation turns is this,—that the free subjects of this kingdom have a Right of Property in their own goods; in other words, that the People of England cannot be legally and constitutionally taxed without their own consent.—I suppose this will not be denied; and yet it is equally indisputable, that this principle is absolutely annihilated by the present frame of the Representation of this House, to which a Petition on your table offers to prove that one hundred and fifty-seven individuals have the power of returning a majority; so that the whole property of the free subjects of this kingdom is, in violation of this first and plain principle, at the disposal of 157 Borough-mongers; or in other words 157 Borough-mongers have usurped, and hold as private property, the sovereignty of England:—and can we be satisfied with this miserable, pitiful substitution for the King and Constitution?—Can the People remain contented with the legislation of such a power?—Impossible. Believe me, Sir, the discontent that exists in this country arises principally from the certain knowledge the People now have of the corrupt state of this House, and their exclusion from that share in the Constitution to which they are by law entitled, that they are not fairly, nor indeed at all represented, —in fact, that the interests of this House are not identified with, but opposite to theirs. — Remove this defect, repair this great injury, and the advantages will be immediate and important; the People will then believe that all that is practicable for their benefit will be done; and from that conviction they will naturally be reconciled to those evils, which they would see a disposition to alleviate, and a mutual interest to redress.

Every part of the empire will feel the benefit of the reform; but no where will the great advantages of the measure be likely to prove more salutary than in that most interesting part of



the empire—IRELAND. From the deep interest I take in the concerns of that country, from my idea of its mighty importance, have I reserved the mention of it till last: though the consideration of the manner in which I could devote my best service to it has never been out of my mind, never till now did it mature any practicable plan, calculated to give universal satisfaction to that generous, that insulted people, with perfect security to the state. If reform is necessary here, it applies much more forcibly there; indeed, the peculiar situation of that country makes it a measure of imperious necessity.—On the subject of Ireland I can hardly speak, from the fear of trespassing on the rule I had laid down for my conduct upon this occasion. I dare not venture to trust myself with the grievances of Ireland. It is a subject I cannot discuss without a more considerable degree of warmth than is consistent with that dispassionate line of conduct I am upon this occasion particularly anxious to maintain. My desire is to have Ireland united with this country upon terms, however, very different from those which at present exist. I should wish to see there a perfect equality of advantage, and no exclusions. Of the present Union, so called, I shall speak but little at this time: suffice it to say, that it was a measure contrary to the wishes, repugnant to the interest, revolting to the feelings of that nation; and effected by means the most flagitious, if the most unblushing corruption on the part of the agents, and the breach of every solemn assurance to the great body of that people, not only implied but expressed by the government of that country, deserve the appellation. Instead of that parchment Union, I shall propose a real Union of heart and affection, founded on the broad basis of the Constitution, of equal rights, and reciprocal interests.—Away with that crooked policy, that narrow-minded bigotry of legislation, that intolerable intolerance, which keeps alive perpetual heart-burnings, hatred, and revenge. I wish not to dwell upon this system; it is high time to put an end to it.—Is it to be any longer endured, that four millions of Irishmen should be aliens and outlaws in their native land? Is it safe to have four millions of the people thrust out of the pale of the Con-

stitution? Is it consistent with reason, with common sense, putting justice out of the question, any longer to tolerate such a system? By the adoption of Reform, the government will have the fairest opportunity of removing the principal grounds of dissatisfaction in Ireland; now will be the time to do every thing without yielding any thing, to legislate upon enlarged principles, knowing nothing of particular parties, sects, or factions, keeping alive no distinctions of Catholic, Protestant, and Presbyterian, Tory, Whig, or Jacobin: alarming no prejudice, insulting no party, they may now include the whole within one bond of union of the Constitution, embracing and ensuring the safety and tranquillity of the empire at large. We shall then, and not till then, have an United Kingdom—one King—one People.—We shall, by this recurrence to the Constitution, not only seat the Chief Magistrate upon his throne, and fix the crown upon his head, but we shall place within his hand the sceptre and legitimate power of the King, in despite of those *one hundred and fifty-seven* Borough-mongers, who have **TRAITOROUSLY** usurped all but the pageantry and outward show and forms of Royalty.

What is the condition of the King under this faction? Instead of taking advantage of the elevation of his situation, where the Constitution had placed him, as the eye of the Nation, for the purpose of taking extensive views for the advantage of the national interests, beyond the contracted horizon of ordinary men, his whole time is employed, his whole skill directed, not towards the duties of his high office, but in trying to keep his balance, in endeavouring to conciliate the support of such and such a Borough-monger, in order to obtain his permission to allow the Government to go on.—In truth, the Borough faction have such power, that he is more like a rope-dancer than a King; as they make it necessary for him to be perpetually upon the alert to balance himself on his slippery elevation, whilst the utmost he can do is to keep his place. Such is the state to which he is reduced under the influence of this ignominious system, instead of having his throne fixed on the rock of the Constitution, and bound to the hearts of a whole people. This is not the situation in

which the Laws and Constitution have placed the King, nor that which his dignity requires, and the best interests of the people demand.

The system, of which I have now given but a short sketch, which was introduced at the Revolution, and grew out of the encroachments on the prerogative of the King, aided by the innovations of time, has already cost this nation nearly Eight Hundred Millions of Debt; for though it has been wittily said, that one half of this enormous debt has been incurred in resisting the perfidy and restless ambition of the house of Bourbon, the other half in striving to replace it on the throne of France, this is not true; the fact is, the whole has been incurred in the prosecution of the scheme of corrupting this House.

This question is so completely decided by *Magna Charta*, ("which," as Lord Coke says, "is such a fellow that he will bear no equal,") so strongly fortified by all our constitutional laws, that no inferior authority can be required; but, were I so disposed, I could cite a host of legal and constitutional writers; and all those members of this house who have from time to time expressed their sentiments in support of this measure, whose arguments were never confuted, and whose talents, though successful on all other occasions, were unavailing when exerted in support of Reform. This problem, however, is easily solved, when we consider that the appeal is made to the Borough-mongers themselves, whose interest is opposite to the measure. Their interest is different from that of the People.

Having taken the Laws and the Constitution for my guide, in preparing the measure I shall have to propose, I at the same time examined attentively all those plans for carrying the same principle into execution, which have at different times been proposed; and having avoided all those intricacies which I considered as so many impediments in the way, have reduced it to that plain and simple form, the express image of the Constitution itself.—My plan consists in a very few, and very simple, regulations; and as the disease we now labour under has been caused by the disunion of Property and Political Right, which Reason and the Constitution say should

never be separated, the remedy I shall propose will consist in re-uniting them.

For this purpose I shall propose :—

That Freeholders, Householders, and others, subject to direct Taxation in support of the Poor, the Church, and the State, be required to elect Members to serve in Parliament.

That each County be subdivided according to its taxed male Population, and each subdivision required to elect one Representative.

That the Votes be taken in each Parish by the Parish Officers; and all the Elections finished in one and the same day.

That the Parish Officers make the Returns to the Sheriff's Court to be held for that purpose at stated periods.

And, That Parliaments be brought back to a Constitutional Duration.

The simplicity of this plan appears from its being the true Constitution of England, which has already prepared all the means of carrying it into immediate effect ready to our hands; and I make no hesitation in delivering it as my well-digested opinion, that under the operation of this Reform, it would be attended with much less difficulty to return a whole Parliament, than to settle a dispute at a vestry about a parish pauper. By the adoption of this plan of Reform, those disgraceful practices, which now attend even county elections, would be put a stop to. No bribery, perjury, drunkenness, nor riot; no "Wealthy Brewer," as was humourously described, who, disappointed of a job, takes, in consequence, "the independent line, and bawls out against corruption:" no opportunity would remain for such mock patriotism:—no leading attorneys galloping about the country, lying, cheating, and stirring up the worst passions amongst the worst people:—no ill blood engendered between friends and relations—setting families at variance, and making each county a perpetual de-



pository of election feuds and quarrels:—No Demagogueing. —If I *am* a demagogue, I am as complete a *felo de se* as can well be imagined,—this puts an end to the occupation:—There would be an end to all odious and fanciful distinctions of persons and property—all would be simple and uniform; their weight and influence proportioned to their *intrinsic* value; no qualifications, nor disqualifications;—no invidious exclusions by reason of any office, from the highest to the lowest, either in the elector or the elected—no variable, fantastical, litigious rights of voting—no possibility of false votes—no treating—no carrying out voters—no charges of any kind—no expense, legal or illegal—no contested elections.—The people would have a choice without a contest, instead of a contest without a choice;—no sham remedies worse than the disease pretended to be cured—No Grenville Act. Here I speak feelingly; I have undergone this *remedy*.—It is the remedy of a toad under a harrow.—“*Haud ignara malis, miseris succurrere disco.*” That Act, which has been so highly extolled, was itself called a *Reform*; as all the Acts aggravating the mischief, which have been substituted for the Constitution, are called in this House.

Under the operation of that Act I have suffered a greater pecuniary penalty than any which the law would have inflicted for any crime I could have committed; this *remedy* is a luxury a man must be very rich indeed to indulge himself in. I could not afford it a second time, and preferred abandoning my seat after having been returned, to undergoing another operation of the Grenville Act. One great object I have in view is to relieve other gentlemen from the like benefits, by preventing the necessity of having recourse to *such remedies* in future—by getting rid of all disputes, and contested elections, this good consequence will result from the adoption of this plan: besides preventing endless litigation, ruinous expense, perjury, ill blood, and periodical uproar and confusion, this House will be saved one-third of its time in Election Committees; and the Statute Book will be relieved from the shameful burden of one hundred and thirteen confused and intricate laws,—all pitiful substitutes for the Constitution.

There may be some gentlemen who think we should not

get a better assembly within this House by this or any other plan of Reform.—Even supposing, but by no means admitting, such should unaccountably be the case, the positive evils we should get rid of are sufficient recommendations to its adoption. It must also give rise to other important results: those who complain of popular clamour, of persons allying themselves with the people against the sentiments and decisions of this House, would cease to have any room for complaint. In the event of such a Reform no such clamour could exist, no such alliance could be formed; for then the sense of the People would be truly and fairly collected within these walls.

The benefits that would immediately follow the adoption of this Reform are incalculable. Though I am not one of those who would apply a sponge to the Debt of the Nation, yet am I firmly persuaded, that a reformed House of Commons would introduce such a system of œconomy, both in the collection and expenditure of the public revenue, as would give instant ease to the subject, and finally, and that at no very distant period, by a due application of national resources to national objects, *and to them alone*, free the people from that enormous load of debt and consequent taxation, under which the nation is weighed down.

Three descriptions of persons, I will admit, would have great cause to complain of this Reform: The Borough-mongers—the Lawyers—and the King's Printer. The whole of the question then is, Which is to be preferred, the interest of the whole Empire, or the interests of the Borough-mongers, the Lawyers, and the King's Printer?

At all events, I hope this consequence will follow, that after this night it will not be asserted nor insinuated, that I have any concealed purpose, that I shrink from speaking my sentiments frankly, that I decline to act an open part, or that I have any designs beyond those I avow: notwithstanding what I have urged, I beg leave to repeat, that I am open to conviction; that I am still ready to listen to all fair reasoning on the subject; that I have nothing to bias my mind; nor any other view than the public good. It will, at the same time, be naturally understood, that having devoted so much of my time and reflection to this subject of vital importance,



my opinions cannot easily be shaken, nor affected by slight and common-place arguments.

I have stated fully and dispassionately, and I hope clearly and satisfactorily, to this House and to the Public, the remedy for all our grievances, which I have been so often called upon to produce. I have obeyed that call; in that at least I have given satisfaction.—The remedy I have proposed is simple, constitutional, practicable, and safe, calculated to give satisfaction to the People, to preserve the rights of the Crown, and to restore the balance of the Constitution. These have been the objects of my pursuit, to these have I always directed my attention—*higher I do not aspire, lower I cannot descend.* I conjure this House to consider the necessity of doing something to satisfy the rational expectations of the public, that we should not go back to our respective parts of the country in our present acknowledged contaminated condition, without holding out some reasonable hope to the country, for its peace and tranquillity, that a Reform adequate to the removal of the enormous and multiplied abuses and corruption now known to exist, and which I contend can only be effected by a House of Commons fairly chosen by the people, will early in the next session be entertained with good faith, and taken into our most serious consideration.—I would have the timid, who stand so much in dread of Innovation, bear in mind, that the simple remedy now proposed is but a recurrence to those Laws and that Constitution, the departure from which has been the sole cause of that accumulation of evils which we now endure—that in many cases timidity is no less fatal than rashness—and “that the omission to do what is necessary, seals a commission to a blank of danger.”—I shall now conclude with moving, *That this House will, early in the next Session of Parliament, take into consideration the necessity of a Reform in the Representation.*

Mr. MADOCKS having seconded the motion,

Mr. PERCEVAL thought it incumbent upon him, after what had fallen from the Honourable Baronet, to trouble the House with a few observations.

The object of the Honourable Baronet appeared to be, that

the House should give a pledge, that it would early in the next Session go into a Committee on the state of the Representation. He saw no reason whatever for entering upon the question of Reform at all, and therefore could not agree to vote for any such pledge. In many of the propositions stated by the Honourable Baronet, he was unable to follow him. Among other things, he assumed it as a fact, that the people were in general desirous of a Reform. This he absolutely denied—and affirmed that, on the contrary, they were more united *against Reform* than almost upon any other question—because they thought Reform unnecessary. He admitted that the Honourable Baronet was accustomed to associate with a certain description of persons who were desirous of Reform, and who would willingly pass such Resolutions on the subject as he proposed to them. But it did not at all follow from that circumstance, that the generality of the people were favourable to Reform. He really was at a loss exactly to know what the Honourable Baronet proposed to himself. The Honourable Baronet said, that all he wanted was to be found upon the statute law of the land. What could he find there that could destroy the ordinary practice of the Constitution? The statutes indeed were explicit on the subject of the Representation—but something more than this was to be found in the practice of the Constitution with regard to that House. What did the Honourable Baronet propose to do with respect to the privileges of that House?—The right of originating taxation belonged to that House at present, by the practice of the Constitution, although not confirmed by any express statute. Was the Honourable Baronet content to get rid of this too among other things? The Lords, certainly, had never given any express assent to this privilege, and would the Honourable Baronet rank it amongst those abuses which had grown up in opposition to the prerogative, or the right of the other House of Parliament?

The Honourable Baronet maintained that 113 Statutes would be got rid of; that if his plan should be adopted it would overthrow bribery, corruption, tumult, &c. Now how was this to be effected? Would no contest take place for the representation of the Honourable Baronet's districts? If contests should take place, then there must be canvassing; and

all those temptations to bribery, corruption and perjury would prevail in spite of the Honourable Baronet's regulations, to the full as much as they prevailed in the actual state of things. Yet these were the hopes which he held out to those who were disposed to listen to his propositions; but how these hopes were to be realized from his plan, he was at a loss to conceive. But the Honourable Baronet would further annihilate the regulation with respect to the 40-shilling freeholds, and all that the law had done on that subject to this day; and would divide the country into districts, in which all should have a vote who paid direct taxes to the State, or the Church, or the Poor. [Sir F. BURDETT--No; those who pay to them all.] Well, taking it so, there might still be doubts as to what should be considered as direct taxes. The Property Tax, the Taxes for the Poor, and the Assessed Taxes, were direct; but to settle this point completely, there must at least be one pretty large statute instead of the 113 of which we were to get rid. Was this the way in which the Honourable Baronet proposed to do away the necessity of employing so many lawyers? (*Hear, hear!*) The Honourable Baronet talked of the advantage of getting rid of the Grenville Act, and of all the statutes against bribery, corruption, &c.—But why should perjury be more difficult under his plan than it was at present? In his districts a man who had already voted, might come under another coat and swear that he had not voted before, just as easily as the thing could now be done in a county (*Hear, hear!*) He saw no reason whatever to suppose that any good could arise from the plan in this respect. The truth was, that such a plan could never produce the expected effects, unless the Honourable Baronet could alter not only the constitution but the frame of the human mind—unless he could at once get rid of human prejudices and human passions. This much he thought it necessary to say; and he did not think that there was any occasion for his going further.

As to the Honourable Baronet's proposition, that the House had admitted that some Reform was necessary, he never understood that any such admission had been made. He did not believe that the House would allow that it had ever made any such admission; and the manner in which the

Honourable Baronet's proposition had now been received, convinced him that he was correct in his opinion. It would be really raising the plan of the Honourable Baronet into an importance which it did not deserve, to dwell upon it at any greater length. The House, he observed, was ready to come to a decision ; and all that he could say, in addition to the remarks he had already made, would only serve to create embarrassment and delay, in a matter which was already sufficiently clear.

On putting the question the numbers were :

For the Resolution, 15

Against it - - - 74

Majority against the Motion, - - 59

### LIST OF THE MINORITY.

|                              |            |                                      |
|------------------------------|------------|--------------------------------------|
| CHARLES ADAMS, Esq.          | Member for | { <i>Weymouth and Melcombe Regis</i> |
| * SIR FRANCIS BURDETT, Bart. | - - -      | <i>Westminster</i>                   |
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| GWYLLIM LLOYD WARDLE, Esq.   | - -        | <i>Okehampton</i>                    |
| CHA. CALLIS WESTERN, Esq.    | - - -      | <i>Malden</i>                        |
| JOHN WHARTON, Esq.           | - - - - -  | <i>Beverley</i>                      |

\* LORD COCHRANE, the other Member for Westminster, was in the House before the division, but was absent, according to Mr. COBBETT, accidentally, at the time of the division; and the Hon. Mr. LYTTLETON, Member for Worcestershire, according to the *Morning Chronicle*, paired off.

\* \* The Borough of Southwark alone can boast that both her Representatives voted for this Motion.

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